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## Providing International Experience for Teacher Training Students from Four Continents: Global Learning in the International Project (IPC)

### Introduction

***The “International Project (IPC)” is a unique online class for teacher students developed and conducted at the Catholic University of Eichstaett-Ingolstadt (Germany) since 2008.***

In order to foster internationalization, teacher training students from currently ten partner universities in Australia, Bulgaria, Germany, Japan, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, and USA meet on an online platform and carry out small qualitative research projects, by working in international groups on a specific topic or by planning classroom projects with partner classes in different countries.

The IPC is based on an inquiry-based and constructivist understanding of learning. Coached by their teachers and student tutors the students work in international groups using learning platforms and digital tools such as Zoom, Padlet, Book Creator, Adobe Spark and much more. By working on topics selected from the teacher training curriculum the students improve their expertise related to the curriculum and develop awareness of cultural differences and communalities. Depending on the didactical format the students get basic insight into research methods, gain experience in organizing project work, enhance their competence in using the internet and media tools, and practice their abilities in planning teaching projects and lessons as well as in

classroom management. There are four different formats of the IPC: IPC Basic, IPC Research, IPC Inclass and Classroom IPC. This paper presents the concept, objectives and the didactical variations of the IPC. Furthermore, an example of an IPC class, held during the winter term 2020/2021, will illustrate how international students collaborated and carried out a common research project.

### Background and Literature Review: Internationalization in Teacher Training as a Task

Callings for internationalization in teacher training reach back into the 1990s. Ochoa and Suzuki (1993) stated,

***“Capacities such as the ability (a) to communicate with people from different ethnic and national backgrounds; [and] (b) to understand other cultures” (p. 62) should be part of the education of all our students.***

Roberts (2007) defined international education as developing “multiple perspectives, intercultural competence, and respect for human rights” (p. 12). She explained that “international education strives to embody knowledge, skills, and experiences that stem from

in-depth study, work, and collaboration with groups and individuals in other countries and with international students and scholars” (p. 12). Since this is more than just global awareness, the term of global competence became more and more common. The OECD PISA Global Competence Framework (2018; 2019) names four main dimensions of global competence: knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes. These are further explained by the chart below. They involve the competency to identify regional, global, and cross-cultural problems and to deal critically with the subjects of poverty, inequality, cultural differences, prejudice, migration, and environment issues. Furthermore, the framework emphasizes the competence of understanding the perspectives and world views of others, of engaging across cultures with people of different national, social, ethnical, and religious background and taking action for collective well-being and sustainable development. “It’s about the habitual orientation toward connection the local and the global” (OECD/Asia Society, 2018).

For the first time in 2018, the international PISA study collected data on global competence from 15-year-old students (Weis et al., 2020).

While Bartell (2003) called for universities to restructure their curriculum to include international experiences for faculty and students, Gillom (1993) noted that “the success of efforts to bring a global perspective to undergraduate teacher education is largely dependent on the

commitment of faculty members to the cause” (p. 41). Even though these two resources were written 20 years apart, we must state that internationalization has until today still not truly taken place in teacher education study programs.

The 2008 updated National Educational Technology Standards for Teachers (ISTE, 2008) noted a connection between teaching and globalization. There is an explicit emphasis on developing and modeling “cultural understanding and global awareness by engaging with colleagues and students of other cultures using digital-age communication and collaboration tools” (Standard 4); and participating “in local and global learning communities to explore creative applications of technology to improve student learning” (Standard 5). Also the current ISTE student standards (2021) show students as global collaborator: “Students use digital tools to broaden their perspectives and enrich their learning by collaborating with others and working effectively in teams locally and globally” (Standard 1.7).

Policy papers of educational departments, universities, and organizations engaged in fostering the internationalization of teacher training, which have been launched during the last years, don't differ much in comparison to the earlier description of cross-cultural and global competence (e.g. Young, 2014). The EU launched the ERASMUS+ program to foster students' and staff mobility in higher education (Council of the European Union, 2011). In Germany, there is also the program “Lehramt.international” of the DAAD with the objective of fostering internationalization in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science (BMBF) (Figure 1).

Compared to the beginning of the 21st century, the technical conditions for launching international projects in order to educate for glo-



Figure 1: The dimensions of global competence (OECD, 2018)

bal competence have fairly improved. According to Vander & Liebtog (2017), ubiquitous Wi-Fi, inexpensive devices improved online and communication tools, learning platforms, and the increasing options to use virtual and augmented reality have facilitated online collaboration in an international context. Regarding the internationalization of teacher training, desiderata are shared online platforms with courses, materials and support as well as teacher preparation programs (Young, 2014).

Although there are many different projects, concepts, and strategies to foster international experience in teacher training (Falkenhagen, Grimm, Volkmann & Koerrenz, 2019, which unfortunately does not include the IPC) it seems that those are not able to reach many students. Teacher students' inte-

rest, volition, and motivation to gain international experience and to go abroad during their studies is lower compared to students enrolled into other study programs (Protzel & Heinecke, 2019). We still lack knowledge about reasons for this and the hindering facts, especially in the case of teacher students (Schön, 2019).

***The problem of how to gain this international experience remains a challenge for our universities. Student mobility and studying abroad, which is important for gaining international experience, still plays a marginal role in individual student experience.***

The willingness to study a semester or more at a university in another country first of all depends on the students' social background. In most cases, the personal attitude and motivation for studying abroad are influenced by the expected additional financial burden (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung [BMBF], 2008). Knowing that many students would not take advantage of opportunities offered by ERASMUS+, Schulwärts (DAAD) or organizations like AIESEC, no matter the individual reasons and factors, was the main motivation for creating the "International Project (IPC)" at the Catholic University of Eichstaett-Ingolstadt in 2008.

**Providing teacher students with the chance to meet students from all over the world could be realized by using digital media. The advantage**

**seemed to be apparent: gaining international experience without traveling, at low costs, sharing and comparing experiences in an international context, and learning and working together in a cross-cultural way was a convincing and motivating reason to create the concept of the IPC.**

### Concept, basic idea and objectives of the project

The IPC is an offspring of a project called "Internet and Project Competence" (IPC) begun by Jean Pol Martin in Germany in 2004. It was a seminar concept for all kinds of subjects and contents developed at the Catholic University of Eichstaett-In-

golstadt. The original concept had been adapted to the teacher training curriculum in 2008 by Klaudia Schultheis (Catholic University Eichstaett-Ingolstadt) and was first tested with Iliana Mirtschewa (Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, Bulgaria) and in the following years continued and evaluated with Leigh Ausband (University of North Carolina Charlotte, USA) (Ausband & Schultheis, 2010).

Currently partner universities of nine countries and four continents are collaborating within the IPC (Figure 2). The number of participating countries in the IPC courses varies in relation to the time schedule and curriculum regulations of the different countries. Current partners are universities in Australia (Australian Catholic University Melbourne – Stephen Spain), Bulgaria (Sofia University – Iliana Mirtschewa), Japan (Junshin Catholic University Nagasaki – Chizuko Suzuki, Shannon Saruwatashi; Yamaguchi Uni-



Figure 2: Current Project Partners

versity – Yuri Ishii), Poland (Krakow University – Natalia Demeshkant), Spain (University of Granada – Isabel Rodriguez), Sweden (Karlstad University – Valery Margrain), Turkey (University Kirikkale – Senil Ünlü Cetin), and United States (California State University Fullerton – Melinda Pierson, Janice Myck-Wayne).

The IPC partners meet annually to discuss the experience as well as the evaluation and to improve the concept (2013 in Eichstaett, Germany; 2014 in Sofia, Bulgaria; 2015 in Granada, Spain; 2016 in Poznan, Poland; 2017 in Eichstaett, Germany; 2018 in Sofia, Bulgaria and 2019 in Fullerton, California). While local students usually participate, international students join the conferences if funding for study trips is available.

***The IPC was designed as an innovative and international teaching project for students at the university level.***

Referring to the constructivist paradigm of learning, the students work in international groups and carry out common research projects. Therefore, the didactic conception enhances autonomy and one's own initiative. The students work as autonomously as possible. This is a learning process for the students that is enhanced by support and guidance from the instructors. Each participating university has at least one native speaking professor and a student tutor or graduate assistant

available for online coaching and communication during the project. Thanks to the combination of local meetings at the universities and the online presence, the students can be assisted whenever needed.

***The IPC fosters the development of a wide range of competences and skills for teacher students in a unique combination.***

There are five main learning objectives for the project. We consider global competence, global awareness, and global understanding as core aspects, which develop through working in multinational teams (Figure 3).

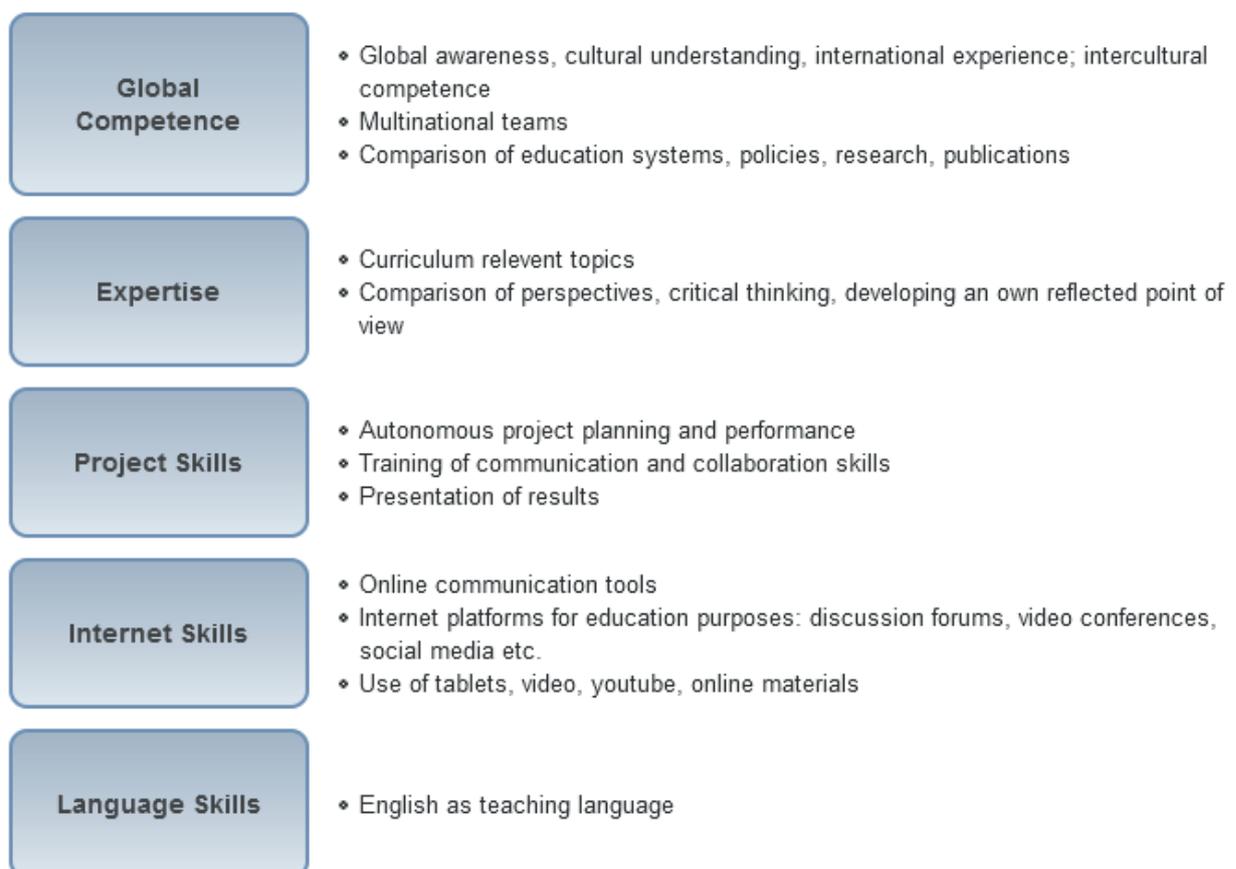


Figure 3: Competencies and skills

### ***Collaborating in international groups provides the students with cross-cultural experiences.***

Learning from the comparison of education systems policies, research, and publications supports building positive attitudes toward people of other countries.

Professional expertise is gained by focusing on relevant topics of the teacher training curriculums of the participating countries. We want students to gain expertise concerning their study curriculum, to develop professional expertise, and to establish and prove hypotheses. Cultivating professional expertise includes developing an understanding of cultural differences and educational systems in other countries. The comparative view of instruction methods, curriculum, childhood activities, and so forth, gives the students a wider perspective and provides a better understanding of the teaching and learning processes at schools in different places. By comparing topics in the study of education pertaining to curriculum and teaching methods students can practice critical thinking and develop an own reflected point of view.

Project skills include working in a team, being proactive and communicating in an international group, and making working plans and time schedules for the group's work. Internet skills include using modern information technology and Web tools such as learning platforms, discussion boards, wikis, Zoom, Padlet, Adobe Spark, Book Creator, Doodle, and online survey utilities.

In general, an IPC consists of three phases. In phase one the students introduce themselves in the discussion boards and create a personal user page. They first contact their international partners through the

discussion board, chats, and Zoom meetings. In this phase the professors provide general readings and make suggestions for the preparation of the subjects of the project.

Phase two depends on the didactical format of the IPC course. There are either clear tasks and instructions for the students related to the topic in the IPC Basic or the students are ready to choose a topic and continue searching for and reading basic and special literature concerning the chosen topic. After this they develop a hypothesis for their research question, work on a draft for their research design (e.g., questionnaires, interviews), and prepare their investigation. In all formats, the students start working in online groups in phase two.

Phase three includes the processing of surveys and interviews (data collection) and the interpretation and evaluation of the collected data in the IPC Research format. In all formats of the IPC, a main task of the third phase is to create a group presentation with the research results. Presentations of the results can use different digital tools such as Padlets, e-books, Powerpoint, websites, explanation videos etc. Students present their products at each university during the students' class time or via Zoom meetings (Figure 4).

### **Didactical Formats of the International Project (IPC)**

The IPC Basic is a structured full online class focusing on a certain topic (e.g., What makes a good teacher; COVID-19 pandemic – impact on schools). Students are provided with material in English and their own languages. They search for resources on the topic on the internet and discuss and work together on tasks within their international groups. The groups prepare com-

mon presentations (e.g., posters, Powerpoint, e-books, websites, blogs).

The IPC Research as a full online class is a more elaborated variation and more strongly research oriented. Teachers suggest or student choose their own topics. Students carry out small research projects in international groups and compare the results of the participating countries. The class can be more or less pre-structured in regard to research topics, readings, tasks, work plan, time frame etc.), allowing proactivity and autonomy in the learning process.

The IPC Inclass is a shorter version that can be included in regular classes and lasts about four weeks. During this period, students of two or more universities work on a common topic by discussing texts or other materials and summarizing their results in a brief presentation. In an IPC Global Discussion, students of one country prepare a number of questions related to a certain topic for students of one or more other countries, collect the respective answers and summarize them in a presentation for all participants. This is a flexible and short variation that can be easily added to regular classes.

Classroom IPC transfers the IPC concept into schools: teacher students of two countries prepare a teaching project for school classes.



## Didactical variations of the IPC

<b>IPC Basic</b>	Structured online class on a certain topic with tasks, international discussion groups, group presentations; full class
<b>IPC Research</b>	Research-oriented learning: Learning through research projects; full class
<b>IPC Inclass</b>	Reflexive Learning: Learning through comparison, discussion, common presentation on a certain topic; part of a regular class
<b>IPC Global Discussion</b>	Basic discussion of school system, instruction, education, children's learning etc. by preparing questions; flexible integration into classes
<b>Classroom IPC</b>	Hands-on Learning: Learning through praxis projects at schools/with school students

Figure 4: Didactical formats

### Practicalities

Several learning management systems have been used over time. To save costs and ensure access for the students of all countries, we currently use PowerSchoolLearning and Schoology. Both platforms offer discussion forums, the possibility to upload files, and group spaces. Zoom or Skype meetings are very helpful to create motivation for the students. Professors of each country support the students when working in groups. Student tutors can help with technical issues or organization. The number of credits students can

gain at the individual universities varies. A few partner universities still need to integrate the IPC into the study programs so that students can be graded and credited. The required duration of the IPC also varies related to the chosen didactical format: a full semester for the IPC Basic, IPC Research, and Classroom IPC, four weeks for the IPC Inclass and two weeks for the IPC Global Discussion – which might be adapted in accordance to special conditions. The different levels of English language skills among the students of the participating countries pose a possible challenge. In case of students

with a lower level, we refer to the IPC Basic or the IPC Inclass. The IPC Research is the most ambitious format of the IPC and requires solid English language skills. Depending on funding opportunities we offer study trips to the students to meet their IPC partners. American students visit the Catholic University of Eichstaett-Ingolstadt at a regular basis. Students join the annual conference meetings of the IPC colleagues or participate in our PAJAKO project funded by the DAAD between Germany and Japan in 2016/2017 (Development of a transferable IPC Basic course structure).

**Example:  
IPC Research “Fostering students’ resilience during COVID-19 pandemic” (2020/2021)**

During the winter term 2020/2021, German and Polish students carried out a common research project with the research question: “How can school leaders support children’s resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic?” Educational settings play a crucial role in attending to physical and emotional safety of children and others. Learning how schools supported children’s resilience during COVID-19, through their leaders, is part of our global preparedness for other future pandemics, and commitment to children’s wellbeing.

Students from Germany and Poland conducted, analyzed, and compared qualitative interviews with school leaders from both countries as part of the online IPC Research course. The students used content analysis to examine the semi-structured interviews with school leaders.

The purpose of the interviews was to consider leadership views on risks and supports to children’s resilience during COVID-19, including strategies that schools have been able to engage with and recommendations for future pandemics.

The results of this IPC Research project show that the promotion of children’s resilience in crisis situations is determined by the strengthening of relationships, active stress

management, the improvement of domestic resources, the inclusion of multi-professional support and the creation of digital conditions for effective distance learning. In this regard, school leaders emphasize the greatest possible autonomy in implementing their strategic interventions. The results stressed the importance of the voices of school leaders because they play a key role in operationalization of policy, strategy, and vision.

At the end of the online IPC Research course students presented their research results of this international comparative study in groups. The results were placed in the international research context.

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